

TOP SECRET

Communist China: *Face Saving or Face Lifting?*

The large May Day turnout in Peking last week shed little light on the intensified infighting that has wracked China's ruling elite over the past year. Instead, the regime's handling of three prominent absentees and its refusal to list the remaining politburo members who appeared alongside Mao Tse-tung and heir-designate Lin Piao in any sort of authoritative pecking order indicate that Peking is still unable to solve its difficult leadership equation.

The most notable absentees were politburo standing committee members Chen Po-ta and Kang Sheng. Chen, Mao's personal secretary, and Kang, the regime's top security specialist, played leading roles in Mao's sweeping purges of the old Communist Party apparatus. According to persistent rumors circulating in Peking's diplomatic circles, Chen and Kang were severely criticized at a major party gathering last fall, and both have been out of sight for some time.

Peking attempted to rationalize the absences with the lame excuse that some leaders were unable to be present due to "work or sickness." The Chinese have never before resorted to this device to explain the absence of important leaders. At this stage it seems premature to conclude that both men, long close allies of Mao, have been finally divested of all responsibility within the leadership, but their continued absence from public view strongly suggests that they have suffered a major setback.

The fluidity of the current leadership situation in Peking was also affirmed by the absence

from the ceremonies of politburo member Hsieh Fu-chih, who came under fire last year, presumably from leftist elements in the regime. Although Hsieh was appointed head of the Peking municipal party committee on 19 March, he did not deliver the customary address at the municipal congress and may not even have been present at the meeting. Hsieh's continued lingering in the shadows thus suggests that there is still some pulling and hauling going on within the leadership over his political status.

Signs of continuing strains throughout the leadership hierarchy were also evident in the sober regime commentary on domestic developments in the authoritative editorial marking May Day. The editorial's stocktaking of internal progress was surprisingly limited, particularly in view of the rapid quickening since last December in the formation of party committees at the provincial level and below—the first order of domestic business for the past two years. Instead of indulging in self-congratulation, however, the editorial stressed the necessity for senior cadre to improve their understanding of Mao's "revolutionary line," to combat resurgent revisionist influences, and to commit fewer mistakes. Such strictures have become the overriding theme in domestic propaganda in recent months, and their reiteration not only attests to the often broad gap between Peking's demands and the performance of local authorities but also reinforces the impression that fundamental differences over policy implementation are continuing to feed personal antagonisms at the top of the regime.

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